

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 1879

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, PINR, NL
SUBJECT: DEN UYL AFTER THE ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: THOUGH OPINIONS DIFFER, THE RECENT PROVINCIAL
ELECTIONS HAVE AFFECTED THE POSITION OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER
DEN UYL AS SOCIALIST OPPOSITION LEADER. THE PREVAILING VIEW
IS THAT HE HAS BEEN WEAKENED AS A RESULT OF THE GAINS BY THE
CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS. END SUMMARY

1. BY CHRISTMAS LAST YEAR FORMER PRIME MINISTER DEN UYL'S
POSITION WITH HIS PARTY WAS SERIOUSLY DAMAGED. AMONG
SOCIALISTS THERE WAS A WIDESPREAD IF NOT ARTICULATED FEELING
THAT, HAVING WON THE ELECTION, DEN UYL HAD LOST THE FORMATION.
AS A RESULT, THE SOCIALIST PARTY WAS RELEGATED TO THE OPPOSI-
TION AND MANY PARTY LEADERS FOUND THEMSELVES WITHOUT A GOVERN-
MENT JOB. ALSO, AMBITIOUS YOUNGER POLITICIANS IN THE SECOND
CHAMBER WERE OBLIGATED TO MOVE BACK TO ACCOMMODATE FORMER
SOCIALIST MINISTERS AND STATE SECRETARIES RETURNING TO PAR-
LIAMENT AND CLAIMING THE FRONT SEATS.

2. FOR BRIEF PERIOD IT LOOKED AS IF DEN UYL MIGHT TEMPORARILY
WITHDRAW FROM ACTIVE POLITICAL LIFE AND TAKE A SABBATICAL.
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CLOSE FRIENDS URGED THAT HE TAKE A FEW MONTHS OFF, TO TRAVEL,
THINK AND WRITE. IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT DEN UYL RAISED
WITH AMBASSADOR MCCLOSKEY THE POSSIBILITY OF A VISIT TO THE US
ON AN IVP GRANT. THOUGH HE HAS MAINTAINED HIS PLANS FOR A
US TRIP, THE PROSPECT THAT DEN UYL MIGHT STEP BACK TO RECHARGE
HIS BATTERIES WAS SHORT-LIVED. COMPELLED BY THE DRIVE FOR

ACTION WHICH HAS BEEN ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF HIS POLITICAL PERSONALITY, DEN UYL SOON SURGED FORWARD INTO ANOTHER ROUND OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY. SINCE JANUARY HE HAS BEEN DOMINANT IN THE POSITION OF SOCIALIST OPPOSITION LEADER AND THE LEADING PARLIAMENTARY CRITIC OF THE VAN AGT GOVERNMENT.

3. SPOILING FOR FURTHER ACTION, DEN UYL TOOK AN INTENSIVE PART IN THE CAMPAIGN PRECEDING THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS ON MARCH 29. THE RESULTS FOR THE SOCILAIST PARTY WERE HIGHLY SATISFACTORY. IT HELD ON TO THE GAINS MADE IN MAY 1977 (REPRESENTED BY A SPECTACULAR INCREASE FROM 43 TO 53 SEATS IN THE SECOND CHAMBER), EVEN STRENGTHENING ITS POPULAR VOTE FROM 33.81 TO 33.93 PERCENT. AS IN MAY 1977, THE LION'S SHARE OF THE CREDIT BELONGED TO DEN UYL.

4. ALL THIS CAN BE SEEN AS STRENGTHENING DEN UYL IN HIS ROLE AS SOCIALIST OPPOSITION LEADER. ONCE AGAIN HE CAN LAY RIGHTFUL CLAIM TO ROLE OF LABOR'S BIGGEST VOTE GETTER. ONCE AGAIN DEN UYL IS LEADING OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN, NOT JUST FOR HIS OWN PARTY BUT FOR THE ENTIRE LEFT. IN THE PUBLIC EYE DEN UYL CONTINUES TO COMMAND A PLACE ALMOST EQUAL TO PRIME MINISTER VAN AGT. SOME POLITICAL LEADERS, SUCH AS D'66 CHAIRMAN GLASTRA VAN LOON, BELIEVE DEN UYL'S POSITION IS GATHERING NEW STRENGTH.

5. OTHERS DISAGREE. THEY BELIEVE THAT THE ELECTION RESULTS ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO KEEP DEN UYL IN HIS LEADERSHIP ROLE FOR LONG. THEY POINT TO THE SUBSTANTIAL CDA ELECTORAL GAINS (31.91
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TO 35.1 PERCENT OF THE POPULAR VOTE), NOTING THAT CDA IS NOW THE LARGEST PARTY. SOME OBSERVERS PREDICT THAT DEN UYL WILL NOT LAST MORE THAN ANOTHER YEAR AND A HALF. THEY POINT OUT THAT DEN UYL IS THE ONLY SURVIVING MEMBER OF HIS POLITICAL GENERATION STILL IN ACTIVE POLITICS AND FEEL THAT THE SOCIALISTS ARE RIPE FOR A YOUNGER LEADER. THEY READ THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS AS MEANING THAT THE NEXT CHANCE FOR THE SOCIALISTS TO RETURN TO GOVERNMENT IS SEVERAL YEARS OFF. THEY DISCOUNT THE ARGUMENT THAT DEN UYL CAN HOLD ON TO OFFICE AS LONG AS THERE IS NO IDENTIFIABLE SUCCESSOR AND BELIEVE THAT LIVELY COMPETITION AMONG THE EIGHT OR NINE POTENTIAL CANDIDATES WILL IN FACT HASTEN DEN UYL'S DEMISE. THESE VIEWS ARE HELD BY RESPECTED JOURNALISTS AND VETERAN COMMENTATORS, SUCH AS BIK (NRC HANDELSBLAD) AND BLETZ (PAROOL), AND CDA POLITICIANS, SUCH AS JEAN PENDERS, RECENTLY IN THE NEWS AS A POSSIBLE POLITICAL ADVISER TO PRIME MINISTER VAN AGT. THEY ARE SHARED BY A NUMBER OF SOCIALIST POLITICIANS.

6. COMMENT: IT IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT DEN UYL'S POLITICAL LONGEVITY. HE IS OBVIOUSLY NOT READY TO RETIRE FROM ACTIVE POLITICS. INDEED, HIS ENTIRE PATTERN OF ACTIVITY--FRENZIED

AS USUAL--SUGGESTS HIS AIM IS TO BE AROUND FOR A LONG TIME.
YET HE IS REPORTED TO FEEL THAT THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS HAVE
HURT HIM AND HE MAY COME TO REALIZE THAT, UNLESS AN UNFORESEEN
MISHAP PUTS AN EARLY END TO THE CURRENT CENTER-RIGHT COALITION,
HIS SOCIALIST PARTY FACES AT LEAST SEVERAL MORE YEARS IN THE
OPPOSITION. THIS MEANS HE WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY SUBJECT TO
PRESSURES TO MAKE WAY FROM A GROUP OF TALENTED, IMPATIENT AND
AMBITIOUS YOUNGER SOCIALIST POLITICIANS WHO SEE THE LONG-TERM
FUTURE OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN OPTIMISTIC TERMS AND ARE
ANXIOUS TO RETURN TO POWER WITH A FRESH IMAGE. FOR NOW DEN
UYL IS CLEARLY THE SOCIALIST LEADER, BUT IN THE ABSENCE OF
AN EARLY OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN TO POWER HE MAY FIND IT IN-
CREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO HOLD ON.

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